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ABSTRACT

There is a movement toward educational decentralization in Australia that is bringing more power to communities in the governing of schools. This report discusses this movement and summarizes the issues and conclusions emerging from the National Conference on School-based Decision-making. An introductory chapter sets the movement in the context of past and present decision-making in Australian schools and argues that school-based decision-making will make schools more responsive, efficient, and effective. Chapter 2 summarizes significant developments toward school-based decision-making in both government and nongovernment schools. Chapter 3 discusses major issues surrounding school-based decision-making such as the tension between diversity and equality, the difference between devolution (decentralization) and true participation, and the structures to be set up for school-based decision-making. Chapter 4 focuses on areas for decision-making such as curriculum, staffing, school-based funding, accountability, and evaluation. Chapter 5 outlines conditions necessary for successful establishment of school-based decision-making, including clarification of goals, adequate preparation, and communication. Chapter 6 summarizes conclusions of the conference about action necessary on the state, national, and school level. (Author/JM)

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SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING

REPORT
ON THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
HELD IN SYDNEY
JUNE 1-4, 1977

PART I

Prepared for the Schools Commission
by
Lyndsay Connors

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FOREWORD

The National Conference on School-based Decision-making was held in Sydney in the first week of June 1977. In three important ways, the Conference demonstrated the principles of openness and participation which the Schools Commission believes to be vital in the development of improved schooling.

First, the Conference was supported jointly by the Commonwealth and the States, a significant demonstration of the federal nature of responsibility for education.

Second, the Conference participants were drawn from all groups involved either in the running of schools or in influencing what happens in them. The result was an important exchange of information and views on past experiences and future directions which established a basis for increased communication and co-operation, especially in problem areas.

Third, the Conference was itself an 'open' occasion in that press reporters were invited and did attend some sessions. The depth of reporting was fairly disappointing at the time, but this report, compiled for the Commission by the freelance Canberra journalist, Lyndsay Connors, is a more adequate statement of the discussions.

It is significant that the Conference was seen by participants as the beginning of a process rather than a single event. In most States groups have continued exploration of the possibilities for further action. The Commission hopes to be able to respond to their suggestions for a further opportunity to report progress and exchange information about successes and problems during 1978.

Although clearly Ms Connors' interpretations are not necessarily those which it might have made, the Commission is nevertheless pleased to commend the report not only to the Conference participants but to all who are interested in promoting a way of organising schools so that they may respond sensitively, effectively and efficiently to the needs of their clients.

K.R. McKinnon
Chairman

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Schools Commission has for some years expressed strong support for the concept of devolution of responsibility in primary and secondary education. Knowing that all school systems were moving forward in the area of school-based funding and decision-making and had shown their commitment to structures which would promote devolution, the Commission early in 1977 proposed the holding of a national conference which would bring together all those involved in these developments. A Steering Committee comprising representatives of the Commission, government and non-government school systems and parent and teacher organisations met and agreed that there would be value in inviting people from key decision-making groups in each State and Territory to share experiences and to explore further the difficult and complex process of devolving power and responsibility to schools.

1.2 The aim of the resulting National Conference on School-based Decision-making was not to produce specific resolutions for action but rather to establish a basis for continuing dialogue among all the participants in schooling. The Conference was sponsored jointly by the Commonwealth and the States. Membership of the Conference consisted primarily of teams from each State and Territory, each as far as possible representative of the groups mentioned above.(1) In addition a number of people with special knowledge of the area wereinvited to attend.

1.3 Each State and Territory system was asked prior to the Conference to prepare a descriptive paper outlining the present position with respect to school-based decision-making and describing current trends and policy directions. In some States these papers were prepared separately by State Department and Catholic system authorities; in several instances a single paper was prepared as a joint effort by the State team of Conference representatives. These papers have been published separately as Part II of this Report.

1.4 The Conference was planned as a co-operative national workshop which would provide policy makers, administrators, teachers and parents with an opportunity

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(1) For membership of the Steering Committee and the full list of participants see Appendix A.

to share their experience and their views and to develop their understanding of the problems involved in the devolution of responsibility. Five major topics were discussed: basic issues; participation in decision-making at the school level; implications for systems; financial management and administrative problems; and support for school-based decision-making. Each topic was introduced briefly in a plenary session by a speaker actively involved in the area; discussion in small groups followed. The Conference agenda is outlined in Appendix B.

1.5 The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Senator J.L. Carrick, who opened the Conference, outlined his Government's commitment to participation by the 'client' in the governance of schools, and referred to our society as one which '... for its sanity, must move into smaller decision-making groups'. 'Without devolution of decision-making', Senator Carrick said, 'democracy cannot flower'.

DECISION-MAKING IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

1.6 Decisions which affect the situation in which children learn in schools have largely been taken in Australia at government central office level. Class sizes for example have been decided on predominantly political, rather than educational, grounds. But it is now being argued that those directly involved in teaching and learning need to share more actively in many of these decisions which affect them directly. Only in this way, it is argued, will schools be able to promote more effective learning and to use their resources more efficiently.

1.7 However, schools do not exist in vacuums. They teach students whose individuality has been shaped by the circumstances of each family and its world. Schools are situated in communities; they promulgate certain types of knowledge; they are funded in varying degrees by taxpayers and by their direct clients; they supply the workforce; and they are affected by the political climate. In this sense, no school can be autonomous, making its decisions in isolation from all the elements in society that are related to schooling.

1.8 At the Conference, a number of forces were identified as having given impetus to moves for greater devolution of responsibility to the school level: the emergence of active, vigorous and informed parent interest; an expectation of increased professional freedom and responsibility by teachers; and moves to delegate power within State bureaucracies for a variety of reasons, political and administrative as well as educational.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Government Schools

1.9 The systems of public education in Australia reflect a commitment to the principle of universal, compulsory education and the belief that schools should offer everyone an equal chance of schooling as one step towards an equal chance of success in later life. In practice, this was interpreted historically as a need for 'equal and uniform provision' throughout each individual State system of education but not necessarily among State systems or between State and other systems. With a need to provide schooling to students in widely dispersed communities and with money for public schooling being raised centrally by State Governments, centralised government systems of education emerged naturally in the Australian setting. Compared with many other comparable countries, they achieved an impressively 'equal' spread of resources among schools. (1)

1.10 Traditionally, most Australian students (around four-fifths) have attended government schools. The decision-making processes in the large State systems, described here impressionistically from the viewpoints of some of those affected, will be remembered by some readers. They have now mostly changed - dramatically in some instances.

1.11 The only decision taken by most Australian families with regard to their children's schooling was the decision of where to live. For this choice prescribed the selection of a particular primary school, through which the student entered 'the system'. The choice of secondary schools was a decision often made beyond the school and often related to the student's performance, either academic or in other areas.

1.12 Most of the materials which arrived in schools came bearing the familiar departmental crest. Other materials which had been 'requisitioned' for some special purpose often turned up long after the teacher who had asked for them had left. There would even be a 'departmental' handwriting style, taught through the State. Unfortunate students who arrived in a school from another State might be bluntly informed: *'We* don't form our 'f's' that way here' or *'We* do division sums this way here'.

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(1) *Schools in Australia*. Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission (Prof. P. Karmel, Chairman), AGPS, Canberra, 1973.

1.13 Among teachers in the large systems, a mythology developed in which the system was depicted like some strange Czarist bureaucracy, remote and faceless on the one hand, but with tentacles reaching to the tiniest corner of the State on the other. The students and teachers would occasionally achieve a rare spirit of shared endeavour in the face of the fearful visit of the school inspector. Teachers would refer to telegrams which ordered them to proceed immediately to the school at the point most remote from all the areas they had been permitted to indicate as preferred appointments. And into the school there would occasionally come the State Minister for Education, who would grant an entirely unannounced half-day holiday, apparently without consultation with parents, transport authorities, or the school staff who probably forfeited the favour trying to cope with the chaos.

1.14 For all this, many students whose claims to any sort of schooling at all may have been cast aside in other comparable countries, did benefit from the existence of these systems. But the systems were often too centralised to respond to regional, let alone individual needs. If the centrally prescribed history book happened to contain the view expressed by some early explorers that black Australians were an inferior race, then the book was studied in all schools, even by Aboriginal students.

1.15 The involvement of parents consisted officially in ensuring that their children were enrolled and attended school regularly. The laws and regulations which forbade parents to have any involvement in the 'educational' side of schooling are extant in some States today. Students for their part were not considered to hold any valid views on the school and schooling and if they did express any this was considered to be impertinent or even mutinous.

Non-government Schools

1.16 Most other Australian students have attended the less centralised Catholic schools. A small number, about 5 per cent, attended other non-government schools, mostly associated with the Protestant churches.

1.17 For many Catholic families, the only decision taken about their children's schooling was that it should be Catholic. The only schools accessible in terms of cost and location were local parish schools. Here, as in almost all private schools, the State education systems exerted a sort of 'remote control' on the school curriculum through a system of public examinations. In addition, the decision-making processes of Catholic schooling have been inseparable from those of a hierarchical church. The decision-making energies of many Catholic schools and of parents of children at these schools, were

concentrated on the problems associated with financial management, even survival. Thus the only substantial curriculum development by Catholic schools tended to be in the area of religious education. The fees in many Catholic schools were kept down by the high proportion of non-salaried religious teachers.

1.18 By contrast, most other private schools have had to charge fees beyond the means of the average Australian wage-earner. Decision-making in private schools, as in government schools, has been concentrated in relatively few hands. It could fairly be said that even in these autonomous institutions, decisions seemed to be taken at a distance from the classroom and by as few people as possible.

1.19 The quality of the schooling each person receives often rests on 'accidental' factors such as special relationships with individual teachers. Admitting this, it is still true to say that Australian school systems offered little in the way of planned or intentional variety. Those parents who have opted out of the State systems for educational reasons, have either done so because of their religious beliefs or attitudes or because they believed that some private schools with more handsome facilities and smaller class sizes could do the same thing as government schools, but do it more effectively.

THE TREND TOWARDS SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING

1.20 In the early 1970's, systems of schooling began to attract heightened interest in Australia. In 1972 the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission was appointed to examine the needs of schools and to recommend to the Commonwealth Government priorities for funding and assistance. It had become apparent that, even within government systems, there was far more to achieving real equality than trying to ensure uniformity.

1.21 The Interim Committee began its report *Schools in Australia* by defining the process of schooling in a way which helped to stimulate the beginning of a much needed public discussion. It focussed on the individual students in schools and on the society in which and for which they are being educated. It explored the concept of equality of educational opportunity; and it supported the values of devolving responsibility to those actually involved in the task of schooling, of diversity among schools, and of community involvement in schooling. The Interim Committee saw an increased responsibility for governments to ensure a more equitable allocation of resources, as well as to provide leadership and support.

1.22 The only newly-established government school system to emerge this century is founded on these principles. This is the Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority, which was set up in interim form in 1973 and formally constituted at the start of 1977. Prior to this, Australian Capital Territory schools had been administered by the New South Wales Department of Education. Education has been defined as 'the progress of an individual towards autonomy in a just and caring society'. (1) It has been argued that if students are to progress towards autonomy then the school in which they learn must have some degree of autonomy. There is little point in trying to educate students for life in a participative democracy in a school which is largely controlled by a central authority.

1.23 It is mainly in government schools that significant moves towards school-based decision-making are to be seen. The obvious reason for this is that non-government schools have always operated in a situation of administrative decentralisation, if not outright autonomy, but they have now begun to centralise their operations far more, in the face of their growing dependence on direct financial assistance from governments. On the other hand, government schools have to be more responsive to changes in the society around them, if only because they have to cater for all comers.

1.24 Decision-making in non-government schools, especially non-Catholic ones, has been school-based, but not always broadly based. Typically, these schools have operated in a way similar to many Catholic systemic schools with a clear division between financial and management decision-making on the one hand and 'educational' decision-making on the other. School boards where they exist have largely been boards of financial management. Educational decisions have typically rested with the principal, in varying degrees of consultation with staff depending on the individual school.

1.25 It could be argued that there is less need for active participation by, say, teachers and parents in non-government schools than in government schools. There is obviously a close link between Catholic schools and Catholic communities; and many private schools proclaim fairly clear values and codes of behaviour which may be assumed to be generally accepted by those who choose to teach or learn in them or send their children to them. Whatever the reason, the school community has generally had the same low level of involvement in school government in private schools as in public.

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(1) P. Hughes, Chairman, ACT Schools Authority, in a Public Forum on School Evaluation, Canberra, 19 March 1977.

1.26 It has often been claimed that there is more sensitivity in many private schools to the wishes of clients, simply because they pay direct fees to the school. If this is so, then it might be argued that the clients must have been committed to conservative and traditional patterns of education rather than to experimentation and innovation.

ARGUMENTS FOR SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Changes in Society - and in Schools

1.27 Democracy is not a static system of government: it is constantly being re-defined. Some recent developments in Australian society show that many people are searching for ways in which they can exert more direct control over the circumstances of their lives. These demands are giving impetus to efforts to decentralize authority and to develop a more participative democracy. In the fields of housing and health, urban planning and communications, transport and consumer affairs the 'clients' have in recent years proved less willing than previously to leave all decisions to authorities or to official experts. Groups of people who have not participated fully in the mainstream of society, for example, women, Aborigines, migrants and the handicapped are demanding greater recognition. These basic changes in social attitudes towards authority and the increasing demands for greater participation in all aspects of government have found expression in the policies of all major political parties. It is not surprising that they are also affecting the area of school government.

1.28 Whether schools perform their functions properly and meet the needs of the community is a matter of real concern to a large proportion of the population. It is natural therefore that the questions of how decisions about schooling are made, and by whom, have attracted increasing interest. At the Conference there was a general strong belief that involved and informed people can and should participate in making the decisions which will affect them. Some speakers proclaimed the general principle that the schools should prepare students for life in a participative democracy and that this implied a need for schools to reflect democratic principles in their own organisation.

1.29 Others tended to state the argument for school-based decision-making in specifically educational terms: when schools are able to make decisions affecting their own teaching-learning situation, they will be more likely to meet the educational needs of each student in our complex, multicultural and changing society.

1.30 The wide variety of opinions and demands now found even within one local community seem to call for new methods of decision-making. One of the discussion leaders referred to a general social trend towards maintaining authority by consensus and influence rather than by decree. In school systems he envisaged a growth of consultative processes at all levels.

Making Schools More Effective

1.31 Another major argument advanced in favour of school-based decision-making is that it should lead to improved efficiency in the deployment and use of resources to promote effective learning. It was argued at the Conference that those on the spot are the best, if not the only, people qualified to assess the needs of students and the kinds of resources most needed and to organise these resources to the best effect. Most participants agreed that the way decisions are made about schooling does affect the teaching and learning which takes place in schools and, in turn, the outcomes. Nobody demanded 'proof' that increased autonomy for schools produced some measurable improvement in student or teacher performance but some did ask the question: 'Is there any evidence which can be used to show the community that there are educational benefits for students in extending the power of schools to govern themselves?'.

Redefining the Relationship of Schools and the Community

1.32 There was general agreement that certain inefficiencies are characteristic of centralised systems - or at least that ways must be found of overcoming the practical problems of operating such systems. However, the movement towards greater devolution of responsibility and participation by the community is not simply about minimising the inefficiencies of highly centralised systems. The need rather is to ensure that all possible resources of the community should be focussed to provide the most effective (as well as the most efficient) educational experience for all students.

1.33 If parents and the community generally become more closely involved in what happens in schools, seriously debating what good education is and helping directly to provide it, there will be real benefits for the community as well as for students. Such an active partnership between the school and the community will be an educational experience for all and will bring a new dimension to the concept of 'lifelong education'.

1.34 School-based decision-making is thus not so much about greater autonomy for schools as about closer integration between the schools and the community.

CHAPTER 2

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 This Chapter summarises briefly some of the more significant recent developments in the present Australia-wide movement towards school-based decision-making.

2.2 Although this summary is based on changes in formal structures and procedures it should be remembered that where schooling is concerned less tangible factors cannot be ignored. Whatever the formal arrangements the degree of autonomy actually exercised by schools in practice may vary considerably. The background paper prepared by the Victorian team on government schools commented:

> 'While it is Departmental policy that participation occurs in decision-making there is a wide variation in practice. In some cases, the Principal exercises a high degree of control over school policy, general curriculum objectives, processes and content, while in others this occurs through participation of the Principal in discussion with co-ordinators, other teaching staff, parents and students.' (1)

The same situation applies in South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. In all systems, large and small, there is an atmosphere which affects the operation of all schools. This atmosphere may be influenced for example, by the style or personality of a Director-General; or by the architecture of the schools. These intangible factors are difficult to assess, particularly for those not directly involved in a particular system.

2.3 Similarly, State legislation does not of course describe what is actually happening in schools, but it does indicate the attitudes of governments and the judgements they make about the climate existing in the educational community. Furthermore legislation can and does legitimise and encourage the trend towards acceptance of greater responsibility at the school level.

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(1) The background papers of each participating team are published separately as Part II of this Report.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Developments in School Governance and General Policy

2.4 In the area of school-based decision-making the most formally advanced system in Australia is the Australian Capital Territory government system. Smallest and newest of the government systems, it was established on the basic principle of devolution of decision-making powers to schools. Machinery has been set up for popularly elected, representative government by school boards in each school and the function performed in States by a Director-General is carried out by the Council of the Schools Authority on which parents, teachers and members of the wider community are represented, along with Ministerial appointees. The decision to establish this type of system followed the publication in 1967 of the *Report on an Independent Education Authority for the Australian Capital Territory*, prepared by a working party organised by interested citizens (The Currie Report, 1967) and the report prepared by an 'Assessment Panel' appointed by the Commonwealth Government.(1) These documents form important landmarks in the movement towards school-based decision-making in Australia. Although the system of self-governance of schools began to develop in the A.C.T. in 1973 and the Interim Schools Authority commenced operations in 1974, the ordinance establishing the permanent Authority came into operation at the start of 1977.

2.5 Under the *Education (Schools Councils) Act* 1975, government schools in Victoria have a choice of forms of school government. With the approval of the Minister, schools are able to choose, from a range of possible options offering varying degrees of freedom and responsibility, the type of school council they prefer. The Victorian Education Department has increasingly followed a general policy of devolving authority and responsibility and parent and teacher organisations have been vigorous in their demands for their rights. The Department has also established a number of highly innovative schools, offering students a variety of learning situations and opportunities for participation in decision-making.

2.6 In 1970 the South Australian departmental document addressed to heads of departmental schools by the Director-General, entitled *Freedom and Authority in Schools*, set out clearly the kind of professional freedom and delegated authority placed with school principals. It stressed the greater effectiveness which could be attained in the running of schools through consultation and participation with teachers, parents and students.

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(1) See ACT government school paper in Part II of this report for details.

2.7 Following the 1971 Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education, *Education in South Australia* (Karmel, 1971) there has been a move to extend the independence of schools through school councils. New regulations expanding the role of existing councils in South Australian schools were promulgated in the 1973 Education Act.

2.8 In Tasmania a significant contribution to discussion about consultation and sharing in decision-making was made by the publication in 1977 of the report *Secondary Education in Tasmania*. This document, the outcome of a broad survey of secondary schools, indicated a low level of participation in decision-making by all but the most senior staff.

Curriculum

2.9 In New South Wales the evolution towards greater regional and school responsibility for curriculum is set out in the *Three Tier System* policy statement issued in 1977. The New South Wales government system paper prepared for the Conference points out that the Three Tier System describes an evolutionary trend, rather than a position which has been fully realised:

> 'In that central curriculum statements provide a broad framework only, there is considerable and ever-increasing participation in curriculum at the school level as the principal and staff develop the details of a curriculum appropriate to each individual school. Greatly increased efforts have been made recently, however, to increase the involvement of teachers in the development of central curriculum statements. Recent primary curriculum statements on language and social studies were issued only after extensive consultation with teachers and administrators throughout the State and following extensive trials. The current curriculum operations in primary reading and science are employing an open interactive, problem-solving style based on a network of regional committees working towards a common goal, the production of a system curriculum statement of syllabus. The network in each case embraces all regions and includes teachers and administrators at all levels, consultants and advisers, tertiary institutions, and parent and community representatives.'

2.10 In other States also the establishment within many schools of new formal or informal machinery for school-based curriculum development is providing increased opportunities for classroom teachers to participate in decision-making.

2.11 South Australia has benefited from a consultancy system which has encouraged schools to be adventurous in developing new curricula. The South Australian Conference paper reveals that one significant realisation to emerge from this experience is the need for adequate support within systems for school-based curriculum development.

2.12 In the Australian Capital Territory individual primary schools are responsible for developing their own programs. High school programs for Years 7 to 10 are also developed within the school, generally by teachers in conjunction with school boards, and are approved by the Schools Authority. Courses for Years 11 and 12, for which recognition for tertiary admission is required, are developed within the secondary colleges and are then submitted to the A.C.T. Schools Accrediting Agency. Panels on which community experts and teachers are represented then evaluate the merits of the course and assess the availability of the resources needed to allow it to be successfully implemented.

Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability

2.13 In most States assessment of secondary school students is now increasingly undertaken within the school. Even in the final years of schooling, where students have traditionally been assessed through public examination schools are progressively assuming more of this responsibility. In New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia, moderating schemes are also used to achieve comparability among schools, thus allowing schools greater freedom to develop their own methods of assessment.

2.14 In the A.C.T. attempts have been made to develop a more personalised form of assessment of students while still meeting the entrance requirements for tertiary institutions. Student performance in colleges is evaluated, usually by continuous assessment. Those seeking entrance to tertiary institutions take the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test (ASAT). Their results in this test are then used to moderate between courses at a college and between comparable courses at different colleges. Each student receives an Australian Capital Territory Year 12 Certificate which records college course results, an ASAT moderated tertiary entrance score, ASAT profiling and other descriptive characteristics.

2.15 As responsibility for decisions devolves to the school level, schools increasingly feel the need to be able to justify their policies and activities to the community. Moreover, in view of the wide range of objectives which schools are now expected to pursue there is a need not only to assess the traditional range of outcomes such as basic skills and knowledge, but also to provide evidence of the success with which schools and

their students are achieving a broad range of other educational goals. There is an increasing belief that schools should be accountable to their clients - that is, the local school community, rather than to the bureaucracy. This process will require an awareness and a clarification of educational goals by school communities and by Governments at State and Federal levels.

Support and Advisory Services

2.16 There is growing recognition of the need to provide adequate support for school-based decision-making. In all States and Territories increased numbers of consultants or advisers are available to assist teachers and schools. For example, in the Northern Territory a team of field advisers helps each individual school to develop long-term educational goals that meet community expectations and needs. The team is also responsible for the interpretation of the policy of the system authority and for practical support in its implementation. Some States have imaginative in-service programs to assist school principals to adapt to a new role in schools, where power and responsibility are more widely shared. Others are fostering closer relationships between parents and teachers.

Finance

2.17 In most cases the information supplied in background descriptive papers for the Conference failed to make clear the actual amount of school finance handled by the schools themselves, or the actual degree of devolution of financial control which has occurred. The most significant developments appear to be in Victoria where almost ten per cent of the total education budget is spent by school councils, and where accounting systems have been developed and are being progressively refined to meet the requirements of school-based funding. (See the October 1976 circular and accompanying explanatory document included in Victoria's descriptive paper).

2.18 Early in 1976 two important reports concerning school finances (1) were prepared for the South Australian Education Department. A scheme based on these two reports was introduced in late 1976, giving principals the opportunity to exercise greater financial control within the school. The present situation is seen as a step on the way to considerably greater school control over finances with principals and councils receiving support

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(1) A.G. Burnell and B.F. McMillan, School Based Funding, and M.K. Caust and D.J. McKeen, School Managed Budgets. These were unpublished reports commissioned by the Director-General of Education.

from a Schools Management Systems Project Team so that they can develop sound budgetary practices in preparation for overall financial management. It was reported at the Conference that there have been difficulties in obtaining the agreement of some Departments of the Treasury to the necessary changes. In Victoria special legislation was passed to deal with such problems.

2.19 In the A.C.T. school level involvement in the management of finance is being significantly increased as administrative systems are developed to give effect to the policy of devolving responsibility to school boards in as many areas as possible. The Schools Authority uses 'credit allocations' rather than cash allocations. The Schools Authority provides schools each month with a financial management report. In addition the Authority conducts courses for school personnel and school board members to familiarise them with the funding system.

2.20 Moves towards school-based funding in secondary schools are being planned in Western Australia. Pilot schemes are to be established in a few high schools with approximately $200,000 per year per school being allocated to schools of about 1400 students. From this the school will budget for ancillary staff salaries, equipment and materials, other recurrent expenses and minor works. Audit and accounting systems necessary for this arrangement are being developed. It is anticipated that in this situation a school principal will be able to undertake long-term planning and to balance school resources in order to achieve the best spread of resources for the individual school's educational program.

School Buildings

2.21 In Victoria there have been important moves towards wider participation and consultation in setting priorities for construction programs. In some cases schools are being given a significant say in the design of buildings to suit the specific needs of the school. Regional Priorities Review Committees comprising 'consumers', administrators and other experts draw up priorities for all school building projects. Allocation of resources among regions is determined by a similarly representative agency at State level.

2.22 In South Australia the Parks Community Centre is an excellent example of a co-operative approach to building, involving Federal and State authorities as well as the local community. This arrangement was based on a recognition of the need to provide a new comprehensive secondary school in an area which lacked a range of community facilities.

Staffing

2.23 The employment and allocation of professional staff is, and is likely to remain, the most centralised function within government school systems in Australia.

2.24 A number of technical colleges in Victoria operate like independent schools in that they employ their own teaching staff. These colleges pre-date the Education Act in that State and were originally established under the Companies Act. They provide an interesting and alternative model for school management. Through a process of negotiation and co-operation between the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria and the administration of the Technical Division of the Victorian Education Department, a system has been devised whereby schools have a direct say in the appointment of Principals and Vice Principals. Applications are made to a central authority known as the Committee of Classifiers, which then sends lists of applicants to schools, each of which then establishes an interview committee representative of parents, teachers and other members of the community to interview the applicants and to make a recommendation to the Committee of Classifiers on who should be appointed. The Committee of Classifiers invariably follows the schools' recommendations. Occasionally selection committees have included students. When a candidate has been selected by more than one school, he or she is able to nominate a personal first choice. This system has been acknowledged by those concerned to be very successful. Furthermore, appointments to responsibility positions are now being made by school-based committees which include elected teachers although once again the teachers are employed centrally and paid centrally. The school simply indicates to the employing authority who has been appointed to the position and who will therefore receive the additional allowance involved.

2.25 The Commonwealth Teaching Sercice is the employing authority for all teachers in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory government schools, and is also responsible for teacher promotion. Within the Commonwealth Teaching Service, teachers are promoted following assessment by their peers, with a mechanism for appeal against an unfavourable decision. This process has fostered the growth of decision-making within schools by its insistence on a high degree of professional autonomy for teachers both in the area of curriculum and of teacher promotion.

2.26 Although Australian Capital Territory school boards do not have the direct involvement in staff selection which was originally envisaged for the Territory, (owing to resistance from teachers) the Schools Authority consults with board chairpersons before appointing a

principal to a school. School boards are responsible for preparing job specifications, descriptions and duty statements for all positions established in the school.

2.27 Apart from the exceptions noted, the structure and policies of teachers' unions tend to reinforce the centralised approach to employing and allocating staff by State Departments of Education.

School Organisation

2.28 The structure and organisation of most schools reflect traditional concepts of authority and control but in some cases changes in organisational patterns within schools are modifying the process of decision-making. For example, because the more 'open' organisation of some schools tends to promote participative decision-making they often set a new style which can influence other parts of the system. Similarly, the establishment of in-service programs of staff development may provide new opportunities for teachers to participate in the making of important decisions.

2.29 In several States, notably Victoria, innovative or 'alternative' schools have been established. These provide students with much greater opportunities for participating in decisions, both those affecting their own programs and those determining the organisation and policy of the school. In these schools the staff and sometimes the parents also play a considerable part in decision-making. Although the number of such schools is very small, their existence appears to have had some impact on more traditional schools.

2.30 The development of secondary colleges in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory for students in Years 11 and 12 has also provided impetus for a decision-making role for students in secondary schooling.

2.31 The outstation movement in the Northern Territory provides a unique example of how a particular community can achieve opportunities to determine the nature of the education being provided to their children. Following the establishment of outstations by small tribal or language groups of Aborigines, these groups have made crucial decisions about the type of educational program they want and have selected the teachers, non-Aboriginal as well as Aboriginal.

2.32 The establishment of the Schools Commission programs referred to subsequently (paragraphs 2.38 to 2.41) has also affected the organisation of many schools.

NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

2.33 The Conference was concerned primarily with developments in government systems and had more detailed information about them than about developments in non-government schools. However, it is clear that in some respects the organisation of many non-government schools, especially Catholic parochial schools, has recently become more centralised. At the same time it also seems that many non-government schools are moving towards greater community participation in decision-making at school level. Certainly the descriptive papers supplied to the Conference by Catholic authorities in all States suggest that this is true of the Catholic systemic schools - that is, those schools (mainly parochial) which are organised into State or diocesan systems. The paper outlining developments in Western Australian Catholic schools argued that systemic schools have far outpaced those schools operated by religious orders in developing structures and processes for involving the community in significant aspects of educational decision-making while noting that:

> 'Acceptance of the principle of collegiate responsibility for decision-making did not come easily to all local school authorities, many of whom knew no other way of school administration than the traditional style of control by one person, either principal or pastor, and its variant of shared control by those two.'

2.34 Among the factors acting as catalysts of change in these systems at school, regional and State levels are the increasing reliance on lay teachers, the general growth of lay participation in the control of church affairs, and the explicit policy of the Schools Commission, which is responsible for the disbursement to these schools of funds which provide a large part of their income. In addition Catholic parents have no doubt been as involved as any other group in the general increase in interest in the policy and performance of schools.

2.35 In general, the breadth of powers exercised at school level in non-government schools is sweeping: the opening and closing of the school; total responsibility for the school budget; the hiring and firing of staff. The main constraint in exercising these powers, especially for many of the Catholic schools, has been poverty. This was emphasised in the Tasmanian descriptive paper:

> 'The financial position of Catholic schools severely limits the decision-making capacity of school boards. Most of the expenditure decisions are forced, in the sense that once the necessities are met very little money is available for distribution to any other area.'

School Boards in Catholic Schools

2.36 School boards are well established in Catholic schools in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria and, as in government systems, they vary among and within States as to the degree of influence they exercise.

2.37 The Western Australian descriptive paper presents a picture of sweeping changes in the government of Catholic schools in that State, with the Catholic Education Commission pursuing a role of active leadership in promoting participatory decision-making. Almost every primary and secondary systemic school has a duly constituted school board on which parents and other community members are represented and which exercises considerable powers. In addition, the Commission is fostering the growth of students' representative councils, and of councils which involve parents and the community. These bodies are expressly designed to consider the educational functions of the school and thus to complement the management and planning emphases of existing school boards. In non-systemic schools (owned by religious orders) officers of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia work to assist in developing involvement by community groups in preparation for full co-responsibility of parents and staff in decision-making.

THE SCHOOLS COMMISSION

2.38 The Schools Commission has acted in several ways as an important catalyst in the trends towards devolution of responsibility and community participation. Firstly, its strong endorsement of these trends in its published reports has given leadership and support to all those groups working to further them. As already stated the Report of the Interim Committee provided an initial focus for public discussion and the Commission's subsequent reports have performed a similar function. Secondly, in its own operations the Commission has laid considerable emphasis on consultative processes, including consultation with teacher, parent and community groups and other members of the public. Thirdly, one effect of Commission funding has been to introduce a degree of flexibility and choice where at State, regional and school levels there was previously little room to move owing to shortage of funds or to entrenched patterns of dispersing funds. The descriptive paper from Tasmania illustrated one way in which funding from the Commission has affected the role of parents in schools: "School Parents' & Friends' Associations have in recent years begun to take a more active role in education activities due to the provision of more generous government funding to schools which has largely relieved associations of their fund-raising burden."

2.39 In addition, some of the Commission's own programs have been predicated upon the principle of decision-making by individual schools or school communities and therefore have had an important effect, both directly with respect to decisions made within the programs and indirectly by providing a model to be followed or improved upon by other schools or in other areas. The Disadvantaged Schools Program, for instance, requires each participating school to identify its own needs and then to develop plans for improving the quality of the education which it provides to its students. Each school is required also to involve the total school community in this process - in planning uses of the funds, preparing the proposals and executing the projects. As this participation in decision-making becomes more widely known, other schools and other groups may adopt similar strategies.

2.40 The Commission's Special Projects (Innovations) Program is based on the principle that those who work in and for schools are capable of identifying their own problems and of devising solutions to them. Projects in over two thousand schools have now provided opportunities of this kind to teachers, parents, community groups, to total school communities. Through grants to system authorities, organisations and institutions, support has been given to projects specifically aimed at promoting school-based decision-making and community participation. Grants to Catholic system authorities are assisting in the development of new patterns of decision-making.

2.41 The Development Program also lays emphasis on the initiative and involvement of both teachers and parents at school and local levels.

CHAPTER 3

SOME MAJOR ISSUES

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE

3.1 One comment made at the Conference was that, because of Australia's geographical characteristics, choice between schools was likely to be a practical impossibility for many parents and their children. However, diversity between and within schools is one of the likely outcomes of increasing their autonomy and is one valued by many advocates of school-based decision-making and by the Schools Commission.

3.2 The diversity which has existed between schools in Australia in the past has been rather a matter of 'disparity' - not the positive outcome resulting from a variety of philosophies or teaching practices, but the negative outcome resulting from gross disparities in resources. The issue of parental right to choose between schools has been a vexatious one in the history of Australian schooling, particularly when parents have claimed the right to have their choice of non-government schools subsidised from public funds.

3.3 The goal now being sought is diversity with equality - different paths to equally successful outcomes. School-based decision-making does not necessarily imply a situation where parents 'shop around' for a suitable school for their children. It can mean, however, that with more influences affecting the operation of schools, there will be more diversity *within* each school as the school becomes more responsive to the community around it.

3.4 As might be expected at a national conference, there was constant reference to the peculiarities of the Australian situation. The size and location of schools, the traditionally centralised system of funding and the highly organized teaching profession were recognised as important factors in any consideration of the process of devolution or delegation of power.

3.5 There was consensus at the Conference that a particular danger in school-based decision-making, whether or not it was broadly based in the school community, was that minority and culturally disadvantaged groups could also be threatened by a devolution of power to the school and its community. The fate of vulnerable groups in society cannot, it was argued, be left entirely in the hands of their local communities. Bitter experience has shown repeatedly that there can be even more indifference to the educational rights and needs of Aborigines,

migrants and women where they live and work than at more distant centres of power - in parliaments and bureaucracies where there are few migrants, where women are numerically under-represented and where there are almost no Aborigines.

3.6 If education is defined as 'the progress of an individual towards autonomy in a just and caring society'(1) , then who cares for the individual when society is not 'just' and 'caring'? This question pre-occupied the Conference. Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, even those who expressed the deepest dedication to sharing, devolution and decentralisation of power, turned to central authorities for this protection of the weak. This theme was once illustrated in a parliamentary speech by Mr. K. Beazley, a former Labor Minister for Education (2) in regard to the Commonwealth Government's initiatives in establishing a bilingual program in Aboriginal education, and in classifying disadvantaged schools. As he pointed out, the demand for these actions emanated from central government, not from the parents of the students affected.

3.7 It seems clear then that schools where community resources - time, money, knowledge, confidence - are low, will continue to need the support and protection of central authorities.

DEVOLUTION OR PARTICIPATION?

3.8 Does school-based decision-making mean:

(a) Decisions being made *by* the people affected such as teachers, parents, students;

or (b) Decisions being made *near* the people affected by them such as by the principal rather than the central administration?

The Schools Commission has regarded *devolution of responsibility* in the broad sense of the first alternative, that is, decisions *by* the people affected. This includes the concept of participation.

> 'Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves.

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(1) P. Hughes - see para. 1.22 above

(2) Australia, House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 26 May 1977, pp.1971-1974

> Its belief in this grass roots approach to the control of the schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them and in a position to profit from their experience.' (1)

3.9 Some speakers took this very broad view that there was a need to develop consultative processes at all levels of schooling systems - 'a continuum of influence'.

3.10 Other speakers confined their comments to the narrower concept of school-based decision-making; that is, decision being made *nearer* to but not necessarily *by* the people affected. They maintained that the delegation of authority to schools and community participation in schools were two quite separate issues: 'The important thing is to get decision-making down to the school level, and then the base can be broadened'. Simply, the argument is that a decision must be taken at some place or other in a system. Somebody who is located in the school is likely to be able to assess the effects of certain decisions in that school more accurately than somebody located in the central office or accounts branch, and is therefore better 'placed' to make many of the decisions affecting the school.

3.11 Strictly speaking the delegation of financial power to schools can clearly proceed irrespective of the degree of participation in decisions about use of the money. It was pointed out that the finance involved in running a Catholic school is virtually all handled at the school level, whereas the breadth of community involvement in the schools varies widely. According to this approach, participation in decision-making at the school level may be desirable, but is not a necessary condition for effective decision-making. However, this view was regarded as unduly limited by those who regarded school-based decision-making as a process of democratic government.

3.12 The paper from the Western Australian Catholic system pointed out that one of the benefits which can flow from combining devolution of financial responsibility with structures for shared decision-making is that principals can thereby be relieved of some of their normally considerable involvement in financial matters, which can so easily distract them from their professional educational responsibilities.

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(1) *Schools in Australia*, p.10.

3.13 One parent pointed out that being 'nearer' to the school did not necessarily make an individual school principal or an individual parish priest any more qualified to make effective decisions about the school than a Director-General. In some ways a parent will find it harder to query the decision made by the child's own school principal, than one made by a distant politician or bureaucrat. To delegate power from a central authority to school level, without introducing consultative processes, could 'multiply' the controls exerted by such an authority and thereby paradoxically reinforce centralism.

3.14 A teacher and member of the New South Wales Teachers' Federation pointed out that there was a related danger in the situation where power and responsibility for making decisions was shared between various groups at the school level but not at 'higher' levels in the system. He said that there was no way that teachers would welcome the closer participation of groups such as parents in their work within schools unless teachers were accorded a corresponding right to participate in formulating policies and influencing decisions which are made at regional and central levels and which affect teachers directly.

3.15 There were some who doubted the desire or ability of parents to contribute to educational decison-making. But the tone of succeeding discussions was set by one Director-General when he remarked that, "We cannot assume that an educated and inquiring society will continue to have a low level of interest in school decisions" and that there was a need to make "sensible predictions" as to what level of parental concern and involvement might develop in the future.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

3.16 A policy statement issued in 1973 by the Victorian Education Department answered this question as follows:

> 'No one party or group is fitted to be a sole arbiter of the nature of an educational program. Each party has vested interests and is subject to different pressures. Involvement of all parties appears to be the most likely way to arrive at a balanced solution.'

3.17 As a useful way of exploring this view take, by way of example, even the simple and relatively unimportant issue of school uniform. There are three groups who have an overriding interest in making decisions about school uniforms; students who will wear them; parents who will pay for them; and teachers who will be required to enforce the wearing of them. But, in certain circumstances, other groups may have an 'interest', including groups

beyond the school itself. For example, to save money, a number of schools in one locality may get together to choose a uniform which is acceptable to all and can be supplied through a local manufacturer.

3.18 School uniforms may become a 'professional' matter for teachers. The style favoured by parents and students may be unsuitable for work in the woodwork or metalwork rooms or the science laboratories. The sports uniform may be considered unsatisfactory by the physical education teacher. Parents may well look to 'experts' outside the school for information to support their decision-making. For instance, if the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation discovered that a type of cloth commonly used in school uniforms caused an unpleasant skin ailment or was highly inflammable, this information should be made available to schools. If the Australian Council for Educational Research were to find evidence that the wearing of uniform, strictly enforced, had certain desirable or undesirable effects in the classroom, this would be of interest to the school community.

3.19 Some community groups with no direct links with a school may at times feel that they have a right to comment on the school's uniform. If a school were to choose a uniform featuring an insignia resembling, say, a swastika, this would be highly offensive to large sections of the community. Feminist groups have pointed out, as has the report to the Schools Commission entitled *Girls, Schools and Society* (1) that the restrictive clothing worn to school by girls in the name of 'modesty' or 'femininity' is yet another constraint on their full participation in a wide range of school activities.

3.20 In what possible circumstances could central authorities, even a national government, have any legitimate interest in the uniform chosen by a school? These are not so hard to imagine. To the extent that the cost of school uniforms is tax deductible, every taxpayer has a legitimate interest. Indeed, it was pointed out several years ago, that maximum tax deductions for school uniforms were well above the level paid by most parents with children in government schools and well above what many parents could afford to spend. This brought complaints that such a system of tax deductions favoured high income earners and the provisions were altered.

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(1) Schools Commission *Girls, School and Society*. A Report by a Study Group. Canberra, 1975.

3.21 If everybody in a certain school decides that a certain uniform should be worn by students and that this should be obligatory, the question arises of the rights of one parent or student who objects. This could need to be settled at central level. If government schools in wealthy residential areas were choosing elaborate uniforms which embarrassed some students by their costs, or created a feeling of social divisiveness among schools, it is possible that the regional or central authority might issue 'guidelines' discouraging the practice. The other means by which this problem could be solved would be for parents and students themselves to make the final decision of which school will be attended in a system where no zoning of schools in relation to residential areas exist. Choice could then be made in the first place, bearing in mind philosophies such as this.

3.22 The example of decision-making over school uniforms illustrates the possible range of participants in making a decision, which on the surface appears to be essentially the concern of the parents, staff and students of particular schools. In the course of the Conference, many groups were identified as having an interest in the process of schooling: students, parents, employers, teachers, tertiary institutions, the community, the State or Territory, the nation, and future generations.

GROUPS INVOLVED

3.23 *Parents and teachers.* Many at the Conference saw a clear, legitimate role in decision-making for the parents and teachers in each school although some speakers expressed doubts as to the ability of *all* parents to take a direct share in school government. Clearly, many parents do not seek direct or active personal involvement.

3.24 *The community.* The nature and composition of the school 'community' varies considerably from school to school. One speaker defined the school community as 'all those in the community, excluding those with no connection with, or interest in, the school'.

3.25 *Employers* were identified as one 'interest' group but there was hesitation in accepting that they should necessarily be involved in making decisions. Different sections of the community would be involved from time to time for specific purposes. For instance, a school planning extensive building might seek to involve an architect or engineer or an expert in financial management for the duration of the project or seek to involve academic or curriculum specialists in its curriculum planning.

3.26 *Central authorities.* The role of central authorities does not diminish in importance as schools assume greater responsibility but changes from being one of exercising authority through control to being one of leadership and support for schools. This trend is well-advanced in a number of States and the Territories, especially in the area of curriculum.

3.27 *Ministerial responsibility.* At the 'other end' of the schooling system from the direct participants are the Ministers for Education, directly responsible to Parliaments for what takes place in schools. Their legitimate interest was accepted without question by Conference participants, but the view was widely canvassed that Ministerial responsibility is consistent with consultation, with delegation of authority to schools and with properly constituted forms of 'responsible self-government' for schools.

3.28 *Students.* The question of involvement of students in school decisions was a contentious one. The main worry seemed to be that students would be unable to handle the confidentiality which must be maintained in discussions or decisions involving individual teachers or students. Some speakers evidently could not envisage any role in school government for young students of, say, junior primary age, even though it must be clear that very young children must and do make a number of decisions, based on their own level of interest and preference, in their various learning activities. Others felt that some degree of responsibility in the school's decision-making, graded according to maturity, can be accorded to young children and indeed this happens in some schools. In a few Victorian technical schools, older students have been included in committees to select principals. Student representative councils make significant decisions in many secondary schools and play an important role in secondary colleges. It appeared that Conference participants from areas where students were already involved in school-based decision-making, such as Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, were less fearful of any adverse consequences than those unfamiliar with this situation and felt that genuine responsibility for making choices can be a valuable and educative experience for students, adding to the dimensions of schooling. It appeared, however, that many teachers or parents might have a disturbingly low level of confidence in the capacity of students to use such responsibility well. Questions of the 'rights' of students and the 'rights' of children in society generally, were seen by some to need closer examination.

3.29 *Flexibility.* The roles of all participants change depending on the nature of the decision to be made and the levels of interest that certain groups or individuals demonstrate in particular issues. Some areas are likely

to be seen as predominantly the concern of teachers and some of parents or students.

STRUCTURES FOR SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING: HOW? AND WHERE?

3.30 School boards or councils were the only 'structures' for governing schools discussed by the Conference, although such terms can apply to a wide range of disparate bodies. In government systems, school councils were seen as part of a system, sharing power and responsibility with central authorities and the responsible Minister. In Catholic systems, too, councils and central authorities co-operate in decision-making.

3.31 Although no alternatives were proposed, the concept of school councils as the formal bodies for school government worried a number of Conference participants. Formal school councils, through regulation or legislation, were seen to pose two major threats. The first was that formal councils would share the well-recognised limitations of many of our familiar institutions of government today, becoming inflexible and self-interested. 'We are already over-governed in this country, without setting up even more statutory bodies', was one comment. The reply was given that it was the effectiveness and not the number of such bodies which was significant. The second threat is typified by the question asked by one speaker:

> 'Are we more free in a setting which gives us choice than when we have legislation compelling us to set up statutory bodies?'

He claimed that in his own State there was nothing to stop people in schools setting up any *informal* structures for decision-making in schools which were agreed upon by those operating in the school. He asserted that sometimes the enthusiasm for self-government through a school council fades and the legal status of the council then becomes a burden, demanding an obligatory recognition.

3.32 Most participants, however, seemed to believe that if school councils were to exist at all, they should have legal status, that is power and responsibility. It is out of the question to have a principal, for instance, being told what to do by a body which bears no responsibility for its decisions or advice. On the other hand, setting up councils whose decisions can be treated as gratuitous advice by autocratic principals is a token gesture to democracy and likely to produce frustration. Thus, there seemed to be an 'all or nothing' attitude to school councils. If established, they need legal status, with members elected to them and not appointed, and with financial power to implement their decisions.

3.33 If school boards or councils are to have legal status, does it follow that each school in a State region must follow a common pattern of government? Should the legislation be enforcing or enabling? Two models exist in Australia. In Victoria schools may choose virtually any composition for their school councils, as long as it is approved by the Minister. In the Australian Capital Territory, schools are required to have a school board with a prescribed composition.

3.34 Before school councils can be established a number of questions must be decided. Who is to decide who or which interest groups should be represented on boards or councils? How are people to be placed on boards - by what form of appointment or election? What is the relationship of any school council with the professional people, the teachers, who must implement its policies? Can a council tell a teacher *how* to teach? How *not* to teach? And how far can it tell a teacher *what* to teach? The principal of an independent boys' school in Sydney, gave the Conference a pithy description of the relationship between the Board and the Principal in his own and similar schools:

> 'Their chief job is to appoint the right Principal, and then to enable him (or her) to run the school. The Board should then see whether or not the job is being done properly, and if it is not, the Board has the power to sack the Principal.'

3.35 Establishing school councils is just one step towards achieving democratic government in schools. Other, less formal structures, for example, curriculum (sub)-committees, are invariably necessary to support, stimulate, interpret, modify and judge the work of the elected council.

3.36 In school systems, it is imperative that governing councils or boards be set up in a way which facilitates communication between the school and the central authority and, finally, the Minister. For instance, in the Australian Capital Territory, each school board includes one member who is an appointee from the Schools Office and who maintains close liaison between the two. This system of liaison appears to be working effectively and it is likely that the Minister for Education has more chance of knowing what is actually going on in schools in the Australian Capital Territory than ever before, while more people in the schools understand other areas in the system.

3.37 Since many Conference participants saw school councils as one part of the continuum of consultative decision-making within a system they saw a need for more attention to be given to considering ways in which

various groups could be selected to participate in making decisions beyond the level of the school, say at regional, State or national level. The various national committees, commissions, State committees and regional bodies, the representative Council of the Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority - these and others provide interesting models. The Conference particularly identified the need to explore the possibilities for broadening participation in decision-making at regional level in the States.

COMMITMENT

3.38 How many people really want to govern themselves? And who are they? This question, basic to consideration of what democracy means, pervades discussion about the governance of schooling. Fitzgerald has commented:

> 'My own research suggests that relatively few parents in Australia share any strong desire to become actively involved in the running of schools. This lack of interest seems especially true of working class families.'(1)

Of course, it is difficult to separate lack of interest from lack of opportunity. Some speakers at the Conference believed that interest was likely to grow with greater awareness and opportunity.

3.39 Participative decision-making demands a high degree of commitment, for decisions which in a hierarchical, authoritarian, centralised system were made by paid experts must now be made by people who will, for the most part, have a voluntary interest. They will often be people with a range of other interests and commitments, which make them the more valuable as decision-makers in schools. They have a breadth of experience as parents, practising teachers, workers in the world beyond the school.

3.40 Some speakers saw dangers in devolving responsibility to schools which were not eager and ready for it. They favoured a situation where schools could vary as to the amount of independence they chose to exercise. Schools which moved into a situation of responsibility without the necessary commitment, it was felt, might retreat in the face of frustration to the security of the past, feeling that teachers had proved unable to take responsibility for curriculum, through lack of time, experience or support; and that parents had shown themselves unequal to the task of shared decision-making.

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(1) Australian Frontier Consultation Report, *Decision Making in the Educational Process*, Australian Frontier Inc., Melbourne, 1975, p.13.

3.41 A contrary view is that, whatever powers are available to schools, they will move into their new responsibilities at differing rates and will find an approach to decision-making which accords with their own level of commitment or with the pattern of commitment shown by various groups who are sharing responsibility.

THE DELICATE BALANCE

3.42 School-based decision-making implies changes in the present patterns of authority in centralised systems. Within each school and each system there are conflicting interests. These will not be reconciled by a simple, once-and-for-all transfer of certain functions and powers to schools. What is envisaged is, rather, a continual search for a reasonable balance between these conflicting rights and interests. School-based decision-making, it is argued, will bring more flexibility and sensitivity into the government of schools and more of the diversity which is appropriate to a mobile, changing and questioning society.

CHAPTER 4

AREAS FOR DECISION-MAKING

THE MAIN AREAS

4.1 Several speakers stressed that the reason for identifying key elements in the process of decision-making is to promote improved teaching and learning in schools, together with more effective use of resources. Analysis must precede change.

4.2 Some main areas of decision-making identified by the Conference were:

principles;
aims and objectives;
curriculum;
staffing and staff development;
evaluation and assessment;
buildings; and
finance and administration.

Particular attention was given to the questions of school-based funding and staffing.

4.3 *Principles, aims and objectives.* For school-based decision-making to work effectively, a school must enunciate its own aims and objectives. These should be consistent with system-determined and nationally-determined goals and objectives, which may in turn relate to the achievement of basic levels of competence, to equality of access to education, and to the total development of the student. The Schools Commission has identified certain social values as a basis for its recommendations to Governments, although there has been little public debate or endorsement of these principles.

4.4 *Curriculum.* Curriculum is the area where, for government systems at least, most attention has been focussed on the process of expanding the school's role. A certain degree of choice in some areas of curriculum is exercised in almost all schools, but finance and other resources are, naturally, significant constraints. In Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, central authorities actively promote and support school-based responsibility for curriculum, although as was pointed out at the Conference, the term 'curriculum' is a very vague one and the task of 'curriculum development' possibly demands more time, facilities and expertise than are available in most schools.

4.5 *Staffing and staff development.* In government systems, the general picture is that schools have practically no say in the allocation of teachers to the school but more flexibility than in the past to deploy staff once allocated to the school. Schools generally have more freedom in their employment or selection of ancillary staff. Staff promotion and staff development are being handled increasingly within schools themselves, with support from central authorities and teacher organisations. The role of school principals is being significantly modified by changes in traditional patterns of authority within systems and within individual schools.

4.6 *Evaluation and assessment.* School evaluation and assessment of students are matters of equal importance to schools and to society as a whole. Student assessment is increasingly made within each school but where this assessment coincides with the need for selection of students for limited places in the workforce or further education, moderation schemes are being developed to achieve comparable information. In most States, some form of competitive public examination remains at the end of schooling. Increased autonomy for schools has given an impetus to the search for meaningful forms of school and student evaluation.

4.7 *Buildings.* The provision and allocation of school buildings is a function of central authorities in all government systems, with Victoria having made provision for broader participation and consultation in the process.

4.8 *Finance and administration.* The decisions taken about finance, management and administration whether in a system, or an individual school cannot be separated entirely from the 'educational' decisions. The signifcance of finance in school-based decision-making is discussed in paragraphs 4.10 - 4.22.

4.9 *Involvement at all levels.* There may need to be broader participation in decision-making at all levels in a system. The task of allocating resources is a centralised one but the individual needs of schools must be taken into account. There should therefore be local involvement not only in the school decisions but also in regional decisions,and regional involvement (which has its roots in school involvement) at central (State) level in the decision-making processes.

SCHOOL-BASED FUNDING

4.10 If schools are to make meaningful decisions they must have power over funds, within reasonable limits. Those making decisions must be accountable for them in every sense. It is a political reality that significant

progress in devolving authority to schools will only proceed if economies in the use of resources for schools can be foreseen. There are no extra funds available on any large scale to finance changes in the present pattern of decision-making. Educators, then, must look for savings as well as for more effective schooling in the purely educational sense. By giving schools more direct control of their own expenditure, these savings could occur in a number of ways. Schools could undertake more forward planning. Having the power to spend brings with it the power to save. Schools need the *incentive*, which school-based funding brings, to use their resources more responsibly, economically and effectively. With a much clearer insight into where money goes, those operating at school level are in a better position to allocate the school budget to meet the individual priorities of that school.

4.11 During the Conference session on financial management the point was made that every decision involves a cost in the sense that the school foregoes the chance to do something else with its resources. It was asserted that a monetary value can be assigned to every action within a school, a fact which schoolteachers may not generally appreciate because they do not see money change hands. Because schools, at least government schools, have become used to operating in a sort of financial vacuum, they have not always looked hard for the cheapest available solution to their problems. The school which handles its own finances will think twice about employing its highly-trained librarian in putting plastic covers on books; about buying equipment which is used infrequently or is especially costly to maintain.

4.12 In Australia bureaucracies have grown used to a highly-centralised system of school funding. Treasuries, departmental auditors and finance officers need to be persuaded that, on the one hand, the effectiveness of schools can be improved by increasing school responsibility for handling finance; and on the other, that schools *can* handle finance and the accountability that goes with this responsibility. Of course, many schools, notably non-government schools but also large government schools, already handle fairly large sums of money. In several States and Territories, as noted previously, new systems of accounting more appropriate to school-based funding are being developed.

4.13 Referring to the need for support for schools exercising wider responsibilities, one speaker referred to 'the need to devise means of providing funds to schools which can be spent in a realistic framework of public accountability'. Although the work in establishing and operating such systems would involve costs, some of these would be offset by savings on transactions which could be handled much more efficiently at the local level, (for example, minor repairs to buildings).

4.14 Responsibility for public funds at the school level must be a shared responsibility and should not be vested in any one individual. This was taken for granted in most discussions of school-based funding at the Conference, where it was envisaged that control would be exercised by some responsible group, whether a board of management or a democratically-elected council.

Limitations to Financial Autonomy for Schools

4.15 The main constraint on the power of schools over their total financial allocation is, in government systems, the centralised administration of all expenditure related to teaching staff. Staffing costs are the major slice of the education budget and it was claimed that because of this and other ongoing basic commitments, school-based funding could mean in fact that most schools had very little discretionary money and would not be able to make major re-allocations. As one speaker put it: 'Schools will be confined to making decisions about amounts of money which are nothing more than the icing on the cake'. This drew the response that the icing makes all the difference to the cake. Several speakers affirmed that quite small amounts of money, applied in strategic areas, can and do promote significant changes in schools and affect the outcomes of schooling for students. There were several references to the catalytic effect, both in large systems and in schools, of Schools Commission grants.

4.16 Another constraint is centralised control over the provision of schools and allocations for major building programs, though this control can be exercised at regional level. The size of schools is a further significant factor which could influence the capacity of the individual school to handle its own finance. How could very small schools cope with this additional responsibility? The view was advanced that groups of schools could be formed in some areas to share this power and responsibility.

Problems of School-based Funding

4.17 One likely and desirable outcome of greater autonomy for schools will be variety. However, this variety will make even more difficult the already complex task of allocating resources fairly among schools. Diversity of aims, structure and organisation of schools will create a greater diversity of *needs* to be compared before funds can be shared.

4.18 If, despite this barrier, progress is made in devolving financial control to schools, there are dangers when people inexperienced in financial planning take control: the dangers include overspending; imprudent and unplanned purchasing; unwise investment; and insufficient allowance for unexpected contingencies. Discussion at the

Conference indicated that participants believed school personnel would need some training in basic accounting procedures, estimating procedures and book-keeping, some guidance in resource management within budgetary constraints and the resources to employ registrars or similar types of personnel. Priority should be given to the development of an effective internal auditing system with emphasis on audit reports as tools for improved management. There are numbers of people in the community with financial and management skills and experience who could be available on a part-time basis, to assist schools or school councils in financial management. Or, alternatively, school councils could be constituted in such a way that local expertise is included among the school council membership.

Cash or Credit?

4.19 School-based funding does not necessarily involve direct cash grants to schools. Imprest systems can be used if proper records procedures are implemented. While cash funds give schools desirable flexibility to enter into more varied arrangements at the local level, the redistribution of considerable public funds in this way could have a significant effect on States' financial operations. On the other hand, the imprest system can lead to the sort of situation all too familiar in bureaucracies where funds are allocated according to the amount already spent, so that there is no reward for thrift and a 'use it or lose it' approach develops.

Information

4.20 The Conference voiced a clear demand for more information on school-based funding. Suggestions were for:

a) papers setting out the benefits of school-based funding which would assist those operating at system level in their negotiations with government finance officers in various departments;

b) information to be circulated, possibly through the Schools Commission, on systems of accounting suitable for school-based funding;

c) the setting up of pilot projects in individual schools, and studies and investigations at regional level, which would gather more information on the implications of giving schools more direct control over their funds.

More Effective Use of Resources - A Total Approach

4.21 School-based funding is a necessary condition of school-based decision-making. But it is not, in itself, an answer to many of the 'problems' of schooling. Unless schools use their freedom to develop new approaches to 'organising' teaching and learning situations, the resources allocated to them will not achieve real educational improvement.

STAFFING

4.22 Is it possible to have effective school-based decision-making in government systems without devolving to schools a greater role in choosing their own staff? Typically, in Australia, the school does not choose its teachers and teachers have limited choice of schools. How meaningful are the decisions made by any school council when the key people in implementing them may be arbitrarily appointed and removed? The right of individual government schools to hire and fire teachers was regarded by the Conference as an unlikely and, for the most part, an undesirable eventuality in this country. But what needs exploring is the issue of whether schools could have more opportunity to select staff from those available, with reciprocal opportunities for teachers to select the schools in which they wish to teach.

4.23 In addition, rigid insistence on established staffing patterns does greatly inhibit schools in using their resources flexibly. The employment conditions of teachers must, of course, be protected. But in the A.C.T. for example, the combination of severe budgetary restrictions with inflexible patterns of staffing have reduced the options available to schools quite drastically, especially in view of the originally envisaged freedom for schools, in this system, to use their share of resources according to their own perceptions of their needs and priorities.

4.24 There are very difficult problems related to staffing. Overseas experience, as well as local experience in private schools, has shown that, in a free market, high status schools are in a strong position to command the best teachers.

4.25 But while no simple solutions exist, the present situation is not regarded as satisfactory by many of the parties involved. The problem needs to be analysed more closely by teachers, administrators and the community so that solutions may gradually be found.

> 'We must reduce the teacher turnover so that all teachers stay long enough with the one group of students to be able to give them effective help; we must ensure a matching between staff appointments and the needs of students; and we must ensure a clearer definition of teaching tasks. But the fundamental aspects of reform lie in increasing the responsibility of teachers for the effective education of their students. Only through these kinds of reform will teachers have the freedom and authority to work effectively: only through these reforms will the public be able to assess for itself the effectiveness of the efforts made.'(1)

4.26 In the long term, school-based decision-making implies considerable change in the structures of the teaching profession. If the hierarchical pattern of large systems changes, this will inevitably break down the extremely hierarchical pattern of the teaching profession. Not only will the role of school principal change, in tune with that of central authorities, to become one of supportive leadership, but broader participation in decision-making will confer new status on all teachers in a school. The restless search for promotions through the hierarchy is certainly one cause of the present teacher turnover in school.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION

4.27 How does a local community judge its school? Would parents even know if their school was a good school or not? To the casual observer, it seems as if schools are commonly judged by the smartness of their uniforms, their sporting achievements, their social status, the professions their students enter and the results students obtain in public examinations. In this last instance, scant regard is paid usually to the selectivity of the student intake, either in socio-economic or academic terms. Only recently, as the outcomes of schooling and the relationship between schooling and work have begun to attract more serious examination, has the Australian community even started to think seriously about accountability, about evaluating the performance of schools as well as students.

4.28 As schools themselves take more responsibility, the demand for means of evaluating their effectiveness grows. Teachers become conscious of the need to explain and to justify what they have decided to do. Parents feel there is some point in asking, since discussion

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(1) K.R.McKinnon, Chairman, Schools Commission, in a speech to the Technical Teachers' Association of Victoria, 1976.

can take place at the point where the teacher's decision is made. More information is now urgently needed about means of assessing the performance both of schools and of individual students.

4.29 The problems of accountability have been thrown into prominence by the growing freedom of schools. But they were always there. With highly centralised and authoritarian systems, it is easier to create an appearance of 'accountability' through inspectorates, public exams and control over curriculum. However, it is more difficult to attain the ideal where each school can hold itself accountable to its students, their parents, the local community and through them the whole society. A large system is more likely to be in the position of trying to account to a few powerful pressure groups.

CHAPTER 5

SOME CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

CLARIFICATION OF GOALS

5.1 Schools in Australia require leadership and support in the formulation of broad philosophical aims and goals of education. There are those in the community who appear to equate effectiveness in education with good spelling, with scores in verbal skills tests and at the other extreme with the happiness of individual students. Individual schools may need protection from both extremes. Within systems, assistance must be available to schools trying to enunciate their own aims, particularly for school boards and councils which are newly-established in schools in which there are existing assumptions and traditions which have never been thoroughly examined. Many Australians have not had the experience of confronting many of the possibilities in regard to schooling and tend to retreat to the security of the past. Those who have experience and knowledge of other systems, or the creativity to conceive of improved alternatives, must provide a broader outlook.

PREPARATION FOR DEVOLUTION AND PARTICIPATION

5.2 Do people need to be, or can they be, gradually prepared to govern their own schools? Or can they only learn by actually having the freedom and the responsibility to do so? This question was raised at the Conference.

5.3 Certainly teachers can usefully be assisted, both in pre-service and in-service programs, to talk more easily about their aims and methods with the larger community, especially parents. School principals may need to develop management, communication and leadership skills, since many have been used to exercising personal authority and taking a very large share of responsibility.

5.4 Do parents need training to participate in the government of their schools? Some of the Conference participants who implied that they do possibly overlook the nature of the parents' role in schools. Parents need to participate as parents, not as pseudo-professionals. What parents need most is to unlearn what they have been taught by experience - that there is no place for parents in running schools and that the special role of mothers is to pursue their domestic arts in money-raising activities. The view was put that:

> 'Parents, like teachers and administrators and students need an education system which constantly provides opportunities for us to communicate our equally valid experiences and our own versions of what children need in education'.

It is apparent, in areas where school boards and councils are operating, that parents who feel able to 'speak the language' of teachers are predominant on Boards. With more 'open' government of schooling, this language will change.

5.5 The Schools Commission has recommended that parents be included in in-service programs as one way of improving communication and sharing knowledge. However, this initiative, important in achieving effective decision-making by schools, is limited by the available funding. Schools can help themselves by setting up situations in which parents and teachers can learn to communicate with each other comfortably.

5.6 The main preparation for participation in decisions about schooling comes from the community itself. It is largely self-preparation. Information should be available, but the community must seek this information for itself. The Conference recognised that information cannot be force-fed into an uninterested community with no desire at all to govern its own schools. The process of devolution from central authorities also involves the assumption of powers by those at the school level. Schools learn to govern themselves by deciding to do it. Even within the most apparently prescribed situations, there have always been some communities, some school principals, some teachers who gained the degree of authority they wanted simply by exercising it responsibly. A first step towards changing or improving existing patterns of decision-making is to examine them closely. Many communities barely understand how decisions which affect them so closely are actually made.

SUPPORT

5.7 For many schools, the term 'curriculum development' is rather high-flown for they lack the time, facilities for group activity and, sometimes, the expertise to actually *develop* curricula. The reality for schools is often making choices, rather than decisions, and that the choice is often between existing ideas, methods and materials. One participant commented that this situation can lead to a more prescribed curriculum in practice than was ever likely to have been produced in the most centralised system. Teachers need to be able to evaluate the worth of much of the commercial, pre-packaged, convenient material now so readily available.

5.8 Not all schools or teachers need professional assistance from outside the school. Those providing support services must be sensitive to the different needs of schools, and must recognise the high degree of skill and experience within many schools. Curriculum 'experts' are in short supply and are most likely to be valuable when engaged in developmental work in centres beyond schools within State Education Departments, tertiary institutions or the Curriculum Development Centre. Schools need direct and ongoing contact with consultancy services, with consultants being able to develop a working relationship with teachers rather than supplying a fly-by-night service which may not be of lasting value.

5.9 Teachers need to be given clear information about the range of services within their reach. This could be provided by information services set up at local, regional and central level and, importantly, *within* large schools. Untapped talents of individual teachers and groups of teachers are to be found in many schools and local communities. Schools need to be creative and imaginative and to look for the support they need beyond the traditional departmental services. In Australian schools, teachers, and especially new teachers, need more personal and professional support to assist them to develop confidence in applying newly acquired skills.

5.10 The size of a school and the experience of its staff are significant in determining its need for support from outside. Mobile support services could be one way of providing smaller, isolated schools with live-in visits from consultancy teams. In large systems, the main task at regional levels was seen by the Conference as the provision of support services to schools. It is at this level that services can be co-ordinated effectively, and delivered with sensitivity to schools. The task of matching available resources to the needs perceived by individual schools was seen as a very difficult one.

The Need for Realism

5.11 Greater school independence and autonomy in the area of curriculum must not be allowed to create an insatiable demand for support services. Schools must learn to be realistic and to reconcile their own priorities with the resources available to them.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

5.12 Serious thought should be given to establishing school boards or councils in ways which will ensure good communication between schools and their central authorities. On the one hand, this contact provides the security and the information needed by schools which are embarking upon self-government. Equally important is the support provided by schools to the central authority

and to government, in the form of first-hand information about what is actually happening in schools. This is precisely the sort of information which is an important part of accountability to the general public, but which is inaccessible in systems where authority is reserved to the central office.

THE ROLE OF THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

5.13 Since the capacity of schools to govern themselves varies considerably, who is able to decide that there should be changes at any one time across a whole system in the pattern of government of schools? The decision that there is a climate for such a change is invariably a political one. It must of course be recognised that political decisions are generally based to some extent on 'expert' advice and that no-one is more interested in trying to assess the mood of the community than a politician. But even after a political decision has given formal recognition to an enlarged role for schools in decision-making, individual schools need to find their own equilibrium in the system, somewhere between total reliance on central authority and complete autonomy. Central authorities will need to be able to respond to individual schools sensitively, to offer leadership and protection and to preserve the balance between the rights of each individual and the interests of the wider community.

5.14 When the school becomes the focal point of government in a large system, then the functions of the other parts of the system change - in the direction of support, leadership and even protection.

5.15 In State teams attending the Conference there was a rather striking degree of harmony between representatives of the various key groups. For instance, in teams from Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory the enthusiasm for school-based decision-making was comparatively high and equally so among teachers, parents and administrators. If there is demand for freedom and responsibility at the 'grass roots' in these States, then, as was pointed out by one participant, this has been matched by the leadership given by central authorities.

5.16 The continuing need for central authorities at State and national levels was never challenged. If anything, participants spoke in terms of an expanded and more vital leadership role for them as schools assumed increased control over their own immediate situations. The pattern of decision-making which seemed to be outlined by parent and teacher representatives in particular could be described as a continuum of participative and consultative decision-making at *all* levels. Various

examples of this pattern emerging at school, regional and State levels exist already in Australia, while at national level the most notable example is the Schools Commission.

CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

5.17 In some communities there will be a broader range of views on all aspects of schooling than in others. How difficult or easy is it to handle this divergence or even conflict within a school? The problem may be more easily handled where there are many divergent views, as in many urban areas where diversity has necessitated a practical level of tolerance in the community. The situation is likely to be more difficult when there is, say, one clear predominant cultural group in the community and the divergence or conflict is between this group and one smaller minority. This is possibly more likely to occur in some rural communities.

5.18 It can be easier to resolve conflict when the opposing factions are able to meet at the point where the decisions are taken. A parent or teacher opposed, say, to the teaching of religion in any form in government schools may find this easier to accept, when the school community itself can be seen to favour including religious education in the school curriculum, than if this inclusion had been ordered by a central directive. On the other hand, the parent or teacher, or student, may feel freer to express their dissent from the decision to a Minister or a Director-General than to the school principal. However, decision-makers at school level may be in a better position to see the damage caused by destructive conflict, and thus be more committed to finding workable solutions.

5.19 One important aspect of the supportive role of central authorities is to offer schools some protection against destructive conflict by providing guidelines and processes for arbitration.

TIME

5.20 Timing is an important element in the process of school-based decision-making and many matters discussed at the Conference related to this issue.

5.21 If further devolution of decision-making power to schools is considered desirable, should individual States plan their actions according to time scales, setting definite periods for the achievement of certain goals? In its Report for the Triennium 1976-1978, the Schools Commission noted its expectation that by 1978 each school would be provided with 5 per cent of its total costs in cash so that the school itself could determine how this should be allocated within reasonable limits. This modest

goal, and progress towards achieving it, merits closer study by governments and their departments.

5.22 Schools themselves are more affected by time than most institutions. The student population is transient and teachers come and go. The rapid turnover of school population is an important factor in the consideration of how schools can be governed. Decisions should be taken by those most closely affected by them: this is the philosophy underlying school-based decision-making. Yet many of the more significant and long-term decisions taken by the most democratically constituted of school councils will have far more effect on those yet to arrive in the school than on the decision-makers themselves.

5.23 Will the more direct involvement of the school's students and their parents create unbearable instability in the school? If last year's council voted to include Latin in the curriculum, will this year's newly-elected council put the matter to the vote again, just to re-check on whether it is still a popular decision or will the central bureaucracy make a decision by transferring the Latin teacher to another school? If the member of council who swung a close vote to extend the school's library fails to be re-elected, does the new council then vote again on the matter? Will people who are taking decisions at the school level be able to achieve the long-term outlook which can be taken by central authorities? This year's school council may feel reluctant to spend much of its time in collecting information and conducting research, so that it can be handed over to the successive year's council as the basis for an informed decision. There may rather be some temptation to act in haste to achieve self-justifying results.

5.24 Making decisions about the school's curriculum takes a good deal of teachers' time. Is this time to come from time formerly spent in teaching? If parents are to join in consultative processes when will the consultations occur? Unless membership of school councils is to be confined to parents who are not in the workforce, arrangements may have to be made with employers to allow employees some time to attend meetings at the school.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Changes are already occurring in government, in law, in bureaucracies and in community attitudes to education which are bringing to many communities in Australia a more direct role in governing their schools. However, considerable study is necessary if ways are to be found to move the process forward. Not all of the social changes occurring at present are in the direction of decentralisation. There are inexorable centralising forces present also - the revolution in communications and transport and the widespread use of computers.

6.2 The need for a *national* conference to study a process of *local* government of schools is, in itself, a striking illustration of the paradoxical forces at work. For while State systems are seeking to transfer power to local communities they are also more than ever before aware of the need for stronger links across State borders. If there is to be more diversity, there must also be more communication to meet the needs of a complex and mobile society.

6.3 The papers prepared by State systems before the Conference and the papers produced at the conclusion of the Conference by State teams reveal wide variations among States in patterns of decision-making. Thus, detailed strategies for action must be left to individual States, to be planned in the context of systemic differences.

6.4 Nevertheless, the Conference did identify some broad moves which could be made in all systems. Participation in decision-making should be increasingly widened. At school, regional, State and national levels, formal and informal structures should continue to be established to foster consultative approaches to decision-making.

NATIONAL LEVEL

6.5 At the national level the Conference felt that the Schools Commission should continue to foster and promote the increasing recognition of the school as the focal point for decisions affecting the teaching and learning process, by providing financial incentives to individual schools and systems. A political commitment to school-based decision-making already exists at the national level, in the sense that major political parties espouse the importance of the values of autonomy for individuals and self-reliance for communities. But more

attention needs to be given to formulating more precise principles as a basis for government policy on schooling.

6.6 The gathering and dissemination of information about the governance of schools could also be handled by national agencies, such as the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Schools Commission, the Curriculum Development Centre, research organisations and national committees. Information is needed on school legislation. The powers of school boards or councils, if these are to be more than advisory, require defining in law. Interest was shown in enabling rather than restricting or enforcing legislation. Information on legislation enacted in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory could be circulated to States, as well as information setting out other options.

STATE AND SCHOOL LEVEL

6.7 It was suggested at the Conference that those States which still have laws actually proscribing the involvement of parents in schools, whether or not this legislation is regularly or ever invoked, should take action to have it repealed. At the least, such an action could raise the 'consciousness' of all groups with an interest in the governance of schools.

6.8 States, too, could promote discussion on the broad goals for their schooling systems and could play an important part in publicising the issues related to school-based decision-making, to promote public awareness and discussion. More information needs to circulate among States on practical strategies for devolving and de-centralising authority; for promoting community involvement; and for engaging in discussion with finance authorities on the implications of school-based funding. Information could be passed among States as a basis for discussion of such issues as :

a) whether establishing advisory bodies is a sensible step on the way to full participation in the governance of schools, or just a delaying and frustrating tactic;

b) whether decision-making power can be divided up and devolved in a piecemeal way, with schools learning, say, to control their own funds before they assume increased responsibility for curriculum;

c) whether any decision-making power can be real, without power over funds?

These and related issues need to be aired by all those with an interest in schooling, in the light of whatever information already exists inside or beyond Australia. Caution is needed, naturally, in applying overseas experience to local conditions.

6.9 Pilot studies need to be set up at various points across the country - in urban and rural settings and at school, regional and State levels, to inform and advance public discussion. This is particularly important since most Australians tend to judge educational innovations in the light of their own school experience which, however apt it may or may not have been for them, would certainly not meet the needs of today's students. Perhaps further action ought to be State initiated, but nationally oriented.

6.10 A further activity in the form of a ways and means workshop could be held in a host State. Such an activity could well be attended once again by interested people throughout the country, but people chosen on the basis that they are in a position to put into action any good ideas picked up at the workshop.

Information Available to Schools

6.11 There is a need to gather further information about the effect of greater autonomy for schools on the student in the classroom. Throughout the community there is a demand for evidence that the changes occurring in schools - from more generous funding through to decreasing reliance on public examinations - are producing more effective learning by students. Many Conference participants were confident that this evidence exists but felt that the problem was to make it more accessible to the community. Case studies, anecdotal evidence, material coming from individual schools; more of this is needed. One example of an attempt to meet this need was the School and Community Newsletter which was available at the Conference. This is part of the School and Community Project funded through the Schools Commission Special Projects Program to promote community involvement in schooling through an exchange of information.

6.12 Ordinary, down-to-earth questions are being asked about changes in school government. What influence will the individual parent have when the school is largely run by teachers and other parents? To whom will he or she appeal if unsatisfied with what has been decided? How might a relaxation of external authority affect the very appearance and organisation of schools?

6.13 In one of its recent publications, the Schools Commission has pointed up the need for a fresh appraisal of the ways in which schooling is organised.

> 'The large and formal institution with its standard procedure was originally devised with greater emphasis on cheapness and control than on conditions effective for learning .... many procedures continue, not because of their inherent qualities but because they have been routinised and been placed beyond question.'(1)

6.14 Groups of parents, teachers and students who have actually set up their own schools in recent times (mainly 'alternative' schools often within State systems) have preferred rather smaller schools. Is this what most would choose, given a choice? Certainly there seem to be good reasons for favouring smaller, more intimate settings for younger students. During the Conference, several speakers referred to the traditional involvement of parents in pre-schools in their own States. Do parents find it easier to become involved in running schools at this level of education than in subsequent levels? Is this because they are often small and have a 'family' atmosphere which parents find more comfortable?

6.15 These are the issues needing discussion in any community considering or undergoing significant changes in the system of schooling. The State systems and the Schools Commission should facilitate the recording of case studies of individual schools and provide discussion material to assist school communities at local level.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

6.16 The National Conference in Sydney left no doubts that there is a movement across Australia to redefine the processes of governing schools. This movement varies considerably in scope and speed among systems in the States and Territories but it draws strength from a number of sources. It is not just the demands for participation in schooling from students and parents which are effecting change, but the expanding view of professionalism being taken by teachers, the political trend to consultation in decision-making, and the search by administrators for increased effectiveness and sensitivity in providing services. These changes were welcomed with enthusiasm and cautious optimism by most of the delegates at the Conference.

6.17 The Conference concluded with most State teams agreeing on possible avenues for further sharing of information (Appendix C). No time limits were set for

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(1) Schools Commission, *Report: Rolling Triennium 1977-79*. Canberra, 1976, p.12.

reaching definite goals and there was an emphasis on the need for evolution rather than revolution towards a situation of increased autonomy for schools. In some States this could foreshadow rapid and 'real' changes in the pattern of school decision-making. In others it foreshadows some much needed reappraisal of long-established patterns. The agreed statement produced at the final session of the Conference is reproduced in Appendix C.

6.18 Schools should be a bridge taking their students across to an exciting world of learning. When schooling 'fails' it is often because of the gap between the student and the school. The chances of closing this gap increase when each school takes the reponsibility for finding those ways in which its own students learn most effectively. School-based decision-making is not synonymous with school autonomy. It is rather a way of redefining the role of schools, so as to concentrate the energies of all those involved in schooling on the *students* who are the most important clients of schools.

6.19 Schools will vary in their capacity to assume authority and responsibility for making decisions. They differ now, in all States and Territories, in the degree to which they exercise their present powers (however broad or narrow) and in the degree of support which they need. Systems need to be sensitive to these differences and schools need to work out for themselves relationships between the various groups making decisions within the school, and with various areas in the system beyond the school, so that they can find a 'comfortable' situation and one which can be easily altered.

6.20 Clearly, most participants were able to accept that we are living in a time of rapid change and were able to operate with confidence in a flexible and fluid situation. They had discarded the notion that they should be looking for a neat or quick solution with an inbuilt guarantee of permanent stability. They appeared to favour cautious and progressive devolution of decision-making power, in the full knowledge that there were clear problems. But most of the problems raised were familiar ones. Centralised systems of school government have not brought the equality of educational outcomes for students, nor the efficiency of management which were hoped for.

6.21 The Conference saw its task as one of finding workable ways of moving towards an ideal of self-government for schools. The philosophies underlying the concept were accepted, but close examination of them was put aside in favour of a more 'practical' approach. This was similar to the approach being adopted within systems, as could be seen in the approach to curriculum at central level described in the New South Wales descriptive paper: 'To a large degree, recent changes in the official

'intended' curriculum issued from the Centre represent the best existing teaching practice in schools'.

6.22 The actual elements in decision-making in schools were identified by the speakers who introduced discussion on the main topics. But participants expressed the view that these elements could only be discussed in detail within the 'real' context of systemic differences. In a number of States, existing patterns of decision-making have had insufficient examination to date. Some of the diffidence about exploring issues outside the individual system was related to an 'isolationist' approach on the part of those from various systems. For instance, when issues such as enabling legislation for school councils, financial management at school level or planning for school buildings were raised, there was some reluctance to make use of existing models in Australian States and Territories as focal points for discussion. However, this isolationism was recognised and admitted, because there was recurring reference to the need to exchange information between systems.

6.23 Although a great deal of interest was shown by those from government schools in the decision-making patterns followed in non-government schools, it was nevertheless the changing situation in government school systems which was the focal point of interest at the Conference. But the participation of representatives from non-government schools gave the lie to fears that school-based decision-making is some sort of education fad or fashion based on unattainable ideals.

APPENDIX A

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING: STEERING COMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS AND PRINCIPAL SPEAKERS

STEERING COMMITTEE

Convenor Dr. Ken McKinnon, Chairman, Schools Commission.

Mr. Ken Axton, Deputy Director of Schools and Colleges (Primary), Tasmanian Department of Education.

Mr. David Bennett, Full-time Member, Schools Commission.

Ms Cath Blakers, Research and Information Officer, Australian Council for State School Organisations.

Mr. Bill Hamilton, Deputy Director-General of Education, Queensland Department of Education.

Mr. Dudley Harris, Deputy Director-General of Education (Resources), South Australian Department of Education.

Mr. Ian Jones, Personnel Officer, Catholic Education Office, Adelaide.

Dr. Ray Maddocks, Assistant Director-General (Curriculum and Planning), Victorian Education Department.

Mr. Alan Marriage, Member of Council, Technical Teachers Association of Victoria.

Mr. Brian Peck, Director (Operations), The Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority.

Mr. Athol Verdon, Deputy Secretary (Resources), New South Wales Department of Education.

Dr. A. Walkington, Director of Planning, Education Department of Western Australia.

Executive Officer Ms Shirley Randell, Acting Director Disadvantaged Schools Program, Schools Commission.

PARTICIPANTS

State Teams

New South Wales.

Ms Joan Brown, President, Federation of Infants School Clubs, New South Wales.

Mr. Ray Cavenagh, Teacher, Pymble State School, New South Wales.

Ms Totti Cohen, President, New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations.

Dr. Les Gordon, Director of Education, St. George Region, New South Wales.

Mr. Peter Mullane, Director, Catholic Education Office, Bathurst, New South Wales.

New South Wales (cont.)

Mr. Ian Vacchini, Inspector of Schools, New South Wales Department of Education.

Mr. Athol Verdon, Deputy Secretary (Resources), New South Wales Department of Education.

Victoria

Mr. John Brooke, Principal, St. Albans High School, Victoria.

Dr. Robin Chapman, Acting Director of Planning Services, Victorian Education Department.

Ms Judy Clements, Vice-Principal, Merlynston Primary School, Victoria.

Mr. Kevin Collins, Director of Primary Education, Victorian Education Department.

Mr. Barry Joy, Assistant Director-General (Finance) Victorian Education Department.

Mr. Bruce McBurnie, Deputy Principal, Lyndale High School, Victorian Secondary Teachers Association.

Fr. Bill McCarthy, Director of Primary Education, Catholic Education Commission, Victoria.

Mr. Ian Spalding, Planning Services Division, Victorian Education Department.

Mr. Colin Thorpe, Immediate Past President, Victorian Council of School Organisations.

Queensland

Mr. Tony Christinson, Vice President, Queensland Teachers Union.

Mr. John Cochran, Principal, Beenleigh State School, Queensland.

Mr. Bill Hamilton, Deputy Director-General of Education, Queensland Department of Education.

Mr. Alan Hinchy, Chief Administration Officer, Queensland Department of Education.

Mr. Rod Kay, Member, Queensland Council of State School Organisations.

Mr. Hamish Linaire, Teacher, Nambour State High School, Queensland.

Mr. Neal J. McBrien, Secondary Schools Consultant, Catholic Education Office, Brisbane, Queensland.

Mr. Keith Pembleton, Principal, Kelvin Grove State High School, Queensland.

South Australia

Mr. Des Byrne, Auditor-General, South Australia.

Mr. Arthur Daw, Director of Administration and Finance, South Australian Department of Education.

South Australia (cont.)

Mr. Dudley Harris, Deputy Director-General (Resources), South Australian Department of Education.

Mr. Milton Hunkin, President, South Australian Institute of Teachers.

Mr. Ian Jones, Personnel Officer, Catholic Education Office, South Australia.

Mr. Ian Wilson, Secretary, South Australian Association of State Schools Organisations.

Western Australia

Mr. Harry Bennett, President, State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia.

Mr. Ken Birks, Senior Assistant Under Treasurer, Western Australia.

Mr. Chris Bridge, President, Western Australian Council of State School Organisations.

Brother Basil Hickey, Principal, Trinity College, Western Australia.

Dr. Harry Pearson, Assistant Director of Schools, Education Department of Western Australia.

Dr. Albert Walkington, Director of Planning, Education Department of Western Australia.

Tasmania

Mr. Ken Axton, Deputy Director of Schools and Colleges (Primary), Tasmanian Department of Education.

Sister Cecilia Bridgeman, Senior Staff Member, Catholic Education, Tasmania.

Dr. David Cooke, Lecturer, Physics Department, University of Tasmania.

Ms Colleen Fahey, Regional Superintendent, Tasmanian Department of Education.

Mr. David Hunt, Regional Superintendent, Tasmanian Department of Education.

Mr. Robert Tanner, Tasmanian Teachers' Federation.

Ms Margaret Walker, President, Tasmanian Council of Parents and Friends Associations.

Australian Capital Territory

Mr. Ian Alder, Vice-President, A.C.T. Teachers Federation

Mr. Alan Davies, President, Aranda School Board, A.C.T.

Ms Diane Mildern, Assistant Principal Education Officer, A.C.T. Schools Authority.

Mr. Peter Moore, Director, Catholic Education, Canberra-Goulburn Diocese.

Mr. Brian Peck, Director, A.C.T. Schools Authority.

Mr. Hugh Waring, Member, A.C.T. Council of P.& C. Associations.

Northern Territory

Mr. Warren Bury, Assistant Principal, Darwin High School.

Mr. John Hicks, Acting Assistant Director (Schools), Department of Education, Darwin.

Mr. Ian Pontifex, Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisations, Darwin.

Mr. Ian Whelan, Assistant Director, (Curriculum Development and Research), Department of Education, Darwin.

Additional Resource Persons

Mr. Mark Bishop, Headmaster, Cranbrook School, New South Wales.

Mr. Pat Brady, School of Teacher Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education.

Mr. Ray Costello, Part-time Member, Schools Commission.

Mr. Bob Cox, Director, Public Policy, Schools Commission.

Dr. Ron Fitzgerald, Burwood State College, Victoria.

Mr. Ian Hossack, Secretary, Schools Commission.

Mr. Bill Hume, Executive Officer, Schools Commission.

Ms Joan Kirner, President, Australian Council of State School Associations.

Mr. Geoff Spring, Acting Director, Curriculum Development Centre, A.C.T.

Mr. Doug Swan, Director-General of Education, New South Wales Department of Education.

Mr. Charles Yacopetti, Director, General Recurrent Grants Program, Schools Commission.

Support Staff

Mr. Terry Chapman, Liaison Officer, Schools Commission.

Ms Lyndsay Connors, Freelance Journalist, A.C.T.

Ms Alberta Holt, Liaison Officer, Schools Commission.

Ms Shirley Randell, Acting Director, Disadvantaged Schools Program, Schools Commission.

Ms Helen Short, Steno-Secretary, Schools Commission

Mr. Dudley Da Silva, Training Officer, New South Wales Department of Education.

APPENDIX B

AGENDA FOR NATIONAL CONFERENCE 'SCHOOL-BASED DECISION MAKING: RATIONALE AND IMPLICATIONS' 1-4 JUNE 1977

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1

4.30pm	Steering Committee Meeting
6.30pm	Dinner
	Opening Speech - Senator John Carrick Conference Objectives - Dr Ken McKinnon Conference Organisation - Mr David Bennett

THURSDAY, JUNE 2

9.00am	I. BASIC ISSUES
	The main issues and principles involved in the devolution of decision-making power to schools.
	1. Discussion opener (20-30 minutes) Mr Doug Swan. Questions/interaction from floor.
10.20am	2. Work groups: discussion of prepared questions in six task groups. (Discussion groups and their conveners appointed for each session. Rapporteurs decided by the group. All groups handed the same draft list of questions. Each group to prepare
	(a) a statement on the current position in Australia, current trends, and needs, and problems related to the theme, and
	(b) a list of suggestions for moving forward.)
12.00 noon	3. Discussion group leaders and rapporteurs finalise statements and suggested action.
2.00pm	II. PARTICIPATION AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL.
	Who should participate at school level and in what ways? What should be the community's role?
	1. Discussion openers:
	(a) Mr Alan Marriage
	Participation: What can we learn from the non-government schools?

(b) Mr Ian Jones

Questions/interaction from the floor.

3.20pm — 2. Work Groups: discussion of prepared questions in six task groups as for Session I.

5.20pm — Discussion group leaders and rapporteurs finalise statements and suggested action.

8.00pm — Meeting of Conference Planning Committee (approximately 5 people, sub-group of Steering Committee) to review sessions, assess progress, determine whether task groups should continue as planned.

FRIDAY, JUNE 3

9.00am — III. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEMS

Question concerning the changes necessary in the organisation of systems to make school-based decision-making possible, in particular the various controls and guidance required at State and regional levels with emphasis on 'educational' and 'quality' controls rather than 'financial' management (dealt with in Session IV.

1. Discussion opener: Ms Joan Kirner
Questions/interaction from the floor.

10.20am — 2. Work Groups: Discussion of prepared questions in six task groups as for Session I.

12.00 noon — Discussion group leaders and rapporteurs finalise statements and suggested action.

2.00pm — IV.A. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

What problems are involved in financial and administrative management in school-based decision-making?

1(a) Discussion opener (15 mins) Dr Albert Walkington. Questions/interaction from floor.

IV.B. SUPPORT SERVICES

What support, development activities and information is required to make school-based decision-making work?

(b) Discussion opener (15 mins) Mr Ken Axton. Questions/interaction from floor.

3.20pm — 2. Work Groups: discussion of prepared questions in six task groups. Participants to discuss 'Financial Management' or 'Support Services'.

5.20pm — Discussion group leaders and rapporteurs finalise statements and suggested action.

8.00pm — Meeting of Conference Planning Committee to review sessions, assess progress, organise Saturday program.

SATURDAY, JUNE 4

V. PLENARY SESSIONS

(These sessions on the final day were organised by the Conference Planning Committee after taking account of the progress of the Conference during the first two days and provided opportunities for delegates to:

a) hear summaries of the work of the discussion groups
b) consider whether they wished to endorse a brief statement summarising the proceedings
c) make an overview of the Conference
d) consider specific suggestions for follow-up action possibilities on a national or State basis.)

9.00am — Reports

(5 x 15 minute reports summarising the outputs of the discussion group in the five sessions with emphasis on:

a) agreed positions about current or future directions

b) suggestions for follow-up action (Action - research, other activities).

Rapporteurs: Dudley Harris, Ray Maddocks, Cath Blakers, Bill Hamilton and Brian Peck.

Following this session, State teams met to prepare statements and suggestions for action for submission to final plenary session.

12.00 noon — Lunch

2.00pm — Final Plenary Session
Statements from State teams
Preparation of Conference Statement.

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX C

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

This National Conference on School-based Decision-making notes its appreciation of the initiative of the Schools Commission in collaboration with the States and Territories in providing a forum for discussion of this important topic and a stimulus for further development.

It hopes that each team of delegates from a State or Territory will following the Conference hold a meeting to consider the implications for their school systems and to formulate proposals for follow-up action appropriate to their own situation.

We request the Schools Commission to publish a report of the Conference, together with a summary of the descriptive papers, and suggest that this report might be supplemented by reports prepared by teams of delegates for distribution within their States and Territories.

We also request the Commission to consider publishing a booklet describing and analysing Australian examples of machinery for assisting in decision-making at school level.

We believe that the further exchange of information and continued discussion of the possibilities of co-operative action would be desirable and productive. We therefore recommend that the Conference Sterring Committee should meet again in six months' time to hear reports of any further action undertaken or proposed in the States and Territories, to identify specific needs for information and to initiate and discuss proposals for further activities if considered desirable.

APPENDIX D

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